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Statement submitted by C-Fam, Inc., a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The family is the most important or only source of social protection for over seventy percent of the world's women. According to the International Labour Organization, more than five billion people on the planet are not covered by comprehensive social security.

Because of the outsized importance of women in the context of the family as mothers, wives, caregivers, and providers, it is essential for the international community to address the family as a subject, vehicle, and principal beneficiary of social protection. As the Beijing Platform for Action recognized in 1995, "women make a great contribution to the welfare of the family and to the development of society, which is still not recognized or considered in its full importance." This remains as true today as it was then.

The international community and governments individually have shown themselves unable to focus on the family in international policy, and even fewer women in the context of the family. And mothers are the least represented of women in United Nations debates.

Indigenous women, women who identify as lesbian or male, businesswomen, and other women are often represented in United Nations debates. But mothers too often get left behind. No doubt this is a function of the selfless and strenuous non-stop work women often take on as mothers. But this neglect must change if the international community is serious about addressing social protection in a way that contributes to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Policies and programs that target the family and consider the important role of women in the family must begin from the starting point of the equality of women and men in the context of marriage and the family, and the nature of the family itself. This organization submitted a statement to the 57th Commission on Social Development outlining the core elements of family protection relevant to social protection policy. Unless laws and policies protect the family unit from instability and dissolution, they cannot be said to be family-friendly.

For women's equality and their empowerment, [illegible]s important to highlight other protective measures that are specific to women.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized the social significance of maternity, motherhood and the role of parents in the family and in the upbringing of children. Importantly, it declared that maternity, motherhood, parenting and the role of women in procreation must not be a basis for discrimination nor restrict the full participation of women in society. Indeed, in order to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment, social protection policies must tackle any form of unjust discrimination against women because of their role as mothers. This form of unjust discrimination is especially odious because it punishes women for a family role only they can take on since men cannot ever conceive and gestate children.

Furthering the Beijing agenda for women, target 5.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals recognize the importance of shared responsibility between women and men in the context of the family, as well as, unpaid care and domestic work.

It recognizes that policies to end all forms of unjust discrimination against women must necessarily emphasize the full recognition of the benefits to society of the unpaid care that women carry out in the family looking after children, the elderly, and other members of their family. Women undertake a disproportionate share of this

work and respecting their equal dignity requires first of all that society fully recognize and value the unpaid work that women undertake in the family.

So long as women are penalized socially and fiscally as second-class citizens when they engage in domestic work and unpaid care they can never achieve economic empowerment and financial inclusion. The debate about domestic work and unpaid care must shift from finding ways to get more women to work in the formal economic sector, as opposed to domestic work and unpaid care, to finding ways to ensure women's lion share of unpaid work and domestic care is fully recognized and valued by society.

It is not enough to create access to markets and economic means. If the only type of work women undertake that is valued and recognized by society is in the formal economy, then women do not have a real option. Fully valuing unpaid care and domestic work is essential for women to be truly empowered and for their equal dignity with men to be respected.

Often the discussion of the gender-wage gap reinforces the narrative that women, in order to be fully empowered and included, must engage in equal numbers in the same identical economic and political activities as men. Far from providing women with choices, this is a utopic and hegemonic goal that can never be realized without some form of coercion. Instead of getting bogged down in the gender pay-gap, member states should consider expanding United Nations policy on equal opportunity in education, the workforce, and the public sector, paying particular attention to the needs, preferences, and choices of women.

In addition to policies to tackle unjust discrimination against mothers, essential family-oriented social protection measures include providing women with the best possible maternal health. Essential to fully recognizing the equal dignity of women must be to recognize and value their role as mothers from the moment they conceive a baby, through birth, and throughout their time as caregivers.

So long as the choice of having a baby is prohibitively dangerous to the life of women or their baby women cannot be said to be empowered or their equal dignity fully respected. Women must have access to the tools to achieve optimal maternal health: education, prenatal and post-natal care, access to life-saving emergency obstetric care, and adequate nutrition and hydration among other things.

At the same time, women must be helped to make the choices that are most authentically theirs. The unethical mischaracterization of women's reproductive intentions through statistical indicators such as "unmet need for contraception" are taking power away from women in poor countries by lasciviously directing resources and attention to family planning when maternal health investments lag behind.

It also means protection from the predatory and unscrupulous abortion industry. Women in vulnerable situations are frequently lured into seeking abortions by a narrative that makes abortion seem like a compassionate choice to a crisis pregnancy. But the truth is that abortion is a tragedy with two victims: the mother and the child.

At the International Conference on Population and Development member states committed to helping women avoid abortion and to provide them with the best health-care and psychosocial support. The operative assumption of that agreement was that abortion is something to be avoided and discouraged and that it is a criminal act, as it is to this day, in most countries' circumstances, with few exceptions.

It is therefore alarming to witness United Nations bodies and officials say that abortion is a human right as is too often the case, and even interfere in the internal affairs of state on this score. Abortion can never be considered a form of social protection, never mind a human right. Women deserve better than abortion and

member states committed to providing them with better social support in the Cairo agreement.

Social protection cannot be achieved without passing through the family. It can only be realized by empowering women to embrace their potential to be mothers as well as to successfully navigate the world of business. The recent trend in international debates is to predicate women's equality exclusively on women's rights in the workplace, but with not enough attention paid to their roles as mothers and caregivers in the family, including the need to provide the social conditions for women to make the choice to become mothers without any kind of coercion, including economic coercion.